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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001054

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON  
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STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA PREPARES FOR REGIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. CARACAS 949  
[1](#)B. CARACAS 922

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(b).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Opposition and pro-government candidates are registered for the August 1 regional elections as the registration period closed March 25. At stake are 23 governors, the high mayor of the metropolitan Caracas district, 336 mayors, and hundreds of municipal council positions -- in sum, the last part of state administration not totally controlled by President Hugo Chavez. The National Elections Council (CNE) has already appointed some 190,000 poll workers to support the 10,580 election tables. The CNE next publishes the candidate lists and rules on objections to candidate applications by May 5. Given the CNE's track record on the presidential recall referendum, whether a fair and transparent electoral process is possible is a prime question for the opposition. End summary.

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609 Elected Positions Up For Grabs  
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[1](#)2. (U) Political parties are engrossed in the candidate selection process for the August 1 elections for governors, mayors, and other state and municipal officials. In all, 609 elected positions will be filled: 23 governors, the mayor of the Caracas federal district, 336 mayors, and 269 state and federal district council members. Governors and mayors are elected by plurality to a four-year term and may be re-elected once. The seven- to fifteen-member state "legislative councils," which have limited legislative powers and budgetary oversight, are elected to four-year terms through both direct and proportional elections. The Caracas federal district also elects a 13-member council. States with indigenous populations are required to have one indigenous person on their respective councils.

[1](#)3. (C) The CNE plans to mount 8,344 voting centers throughout Venezuela (see ref b). These centers will represent 10,580 tables, 7,689 of which will be automated using 19,000 election machines. Jorge Tirado, whose U.S.-based company Smartmatic is helping the CNE organize the elections, told poloff March 24 that the CNE will try to consolidate tables so that some will use up to three machines. About 90,000 poll workers will be selected for election duties, Tirado said, with six or more workers assigned to a table, depending on size.

[1](#)4. (C) The National Electoral Council (CNE) reported on March 26 it had received applications from 140 gubernatorial candidates and thousands of mayoral candidates. After a period for objections and appeals, the CNE will finalize the candidate list on May 5. Currently, the CNE plans to print the ballots on June 15, according to Tirado (Note: Electoral laws do not specify a date by which a gubernatorial or mayoral candidate may withdraw. Presumably, candidates who plan to pull out and throw their support to another would have to do so prior to June 15 to withdraw their names from the ballot.). Election laws limit the campaign period from 60 days before the election (in this case, June 2) to 48 hours before the opening of the polls on August 1.

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On International Observers  
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[1](#)5. (C) The CNE has not announced publicly whether they will invite international observers for the regional elections. Accion Democratica (AD) official Luis Emilio Rondon told poloff March 24 the opposition will request the presence of observers. OAS Chief of Staff Fernando Jaramillo told the Ambassador on March 24 that Rodriguez wants OAS/TCC as well

as UN observers for the regional elections.

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CNE Working Hard  
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16. (C) Rodriguez described the candidate registration process to reporters as "absolutely normal" with no reports of irregularities in the registration process. Smartmatic's Tirado claimed to poloff that his consortium is "running" all aspects of the election. Tirado asserted that he regularly advises Rodriguez on the elections, though he admitted Rodriguez does not always follow the advice. (Note: Tirado mentioned he plans an election simulation for June 27.)

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Comment  
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17. (C) The GOV is focusing on regional elections not so much as an alternative to the referendum, but rather to consolidate its power in the one area where it still lacks full control. We expect the CNE, therefore, to dedicate its full attention to organizing the regional elections. We also expect the CNE to show the same kind of pro-GOV biases during these elections as it has demonstrated with the referendum. International observation will be critical to ensuring a reasonably fair and transparent election.

18. (C) Regional elections are linked to national issues, but local conditions intervene as well. For the opposition, the key questions are can they winnow out competing opposition candidates to truly contest Chavez's candidates, and will the CNE play fair. The MVR's challenges are the strength of some of the opposition candidates, and the extent to which Chavez can transfer his strength to the candidates, many of whom are old military colleagues.

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